

Postmodern Openings

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Trends in the Development of Social Work: Postmodern Ideas and Prospects

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Abstract: The main tendencies of social work from the standpoint of postmodernist theory are considered in this article. It is determined that postmodernism is characterized by: the production of a cult of individual independence, a philosophical vision of real life as a theatre of the absurd, where emphasis is placed on the realities of real life, collective subconscious, interweaving of different styles, significant parody and irony of social processes. It has been established that social work in postmodernism is due to the growing need for a critical understanding of the crisis state of modern society and viewing relations with the state, the market, users of services and society. Social work in the postmodern period is accompanied by a number of social challenges, among which we consider the psychological distress of citizens, cultural competence and virtualization of the individual. The philosophy of postmodernism is based on the relativity and absence of reality, which is often replaced by virtuality, in which people spend a lot of their time, which raises debates about whether a virtual personality can be considered a personality. The main problem of information socialization of the individual is the problem of readiness and ability of man in such a world to approach a more humane understanding of social phenomena. The study highlights the hierarchy of social work and identifies its postmodern transformations.

Keywords: *theories of social work, social reality, postmodern society, neoliberal tendencies, social virtualization.*

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1. Introduction

Neoliberal approaches to social phenomena and processes lead to a significant centralization of wealth and power and the spread of market philosophy around the world. This situation requires a revision of the theory and practice of social work and also forced social institutions and social workers to reconsider their relations with the state, the market, service users and society.

In the era of postmodernism, the rational comprehension of the world on which the philosophy of the Enlightenment was based is increasingly criticized. That is why there is an urgent need to form an appropriate methodology for understanding post-modernity. The philosophical current of postmodernism is based on a non-rational analysis of reality and contains irrational components.

The relevance of research on the topic of social work in postmodernism is due to the growing need for critical understanding of the crisis state of modern society and the corresponding socio-cultural reflection, since it is social reality that is the starting point for understanding human development in conditions of change and, accordingly, forms a system of social guidelines.

The purpose of the study is to highlight trends and prospects of social work in the context of postmodern ideas.

Overview of sources. Issues of social work and its trends are covered in the works of many modern scientists. Simon Härnbro (2019) in their research examines social work in Sweden, with a special focus on motivational work in the neoliberal paradigm and building a motivated client, analyses the formation of the ideal client and how social workers understand his needs.

Carolyn Hanesworth (2017) explores the neoliberal trends in U.S. higher education that have significantly changed colleges and universities that train social workers. He claims that the education of the humanities, which influenced the development of social work education in the 20th century, is now under threat, is considering the consequences for the profession, as well as options for resisting neoliberal pressure in social work.

Jane Fenton (2014) focuses research on the factors that contribute to ethical stress caused by conflict of values and behaviour, using a statistical sample of social workers in criminal justice in Scotland. Finds that younger, less experienced workers generally do not object to neoliberal changes in social work in criminal justice and therefore experience significantly less ethical stress, explores the difficulties that providers of social work programs can have in promoting or aligning social justice in students' practice.

Hefin Gwilym (2018) argues that austerity policies, market and corporate neoliberal state contribute to the authoritarian nature of social work.

Steve Rogowski (2018) notes in his writings that in the UK the welfare state was gradually eliminated, and social work was de-professionalized and turned into narrower and more limited, focuses on the significant bureaucratization of social work and on punitive measures by the state for unsuccessful actions of parents on own children, gives examples of what consequences this can lead.

Trends and critical views on postmodernism are expressed in Jing Yin (2018), which criticizes the Eurocentric nature of postmodernism and argues that non-Western countries and peoples must go beyond postmodernism in order to preserve their identity in the globalization era. The author believes that it is not reasonable or undesirable to erase cultural differences and give up one's cultural identity in order to become a global citizen.

Given the relatively high level of elaboration of certain aspects of our study and paying tribute to scientific conclusions, we believe that the strengthening of scientific results requires the development of social work from the standpoint of postmodern ideas and prospects of Ukrainian society, which led to the choice of research topic.

2. General aspects of social work

A characteristic feature of modern society is that it is a multilevel system in which a huge number of people coexist with their values and problems. Naturally, not all members of society manage to adapt to its many rules, which leads to social isolation and expulsion of such citizens and necessitates qualified support of specialists.

For a long time, there have been discussions in scientific and practical groups related to social work about the priority of its tasks: providing assistance to the most vulnerable categories of the population or carrying out social transformations to improve the standard of living of society. Globalization changes put an end to these discussions, and in July 2014 the IFSW General Assembly and the IASSW General Assembly adopted the Global Definition of Social Work, which means that social work is a practice-based profession and academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, activation and liberation of people. Central to social work are the principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity. Social work, which is supported by theories of social work, social sciences and humanities, as

well as local knowledge, involves people and structures to solve life's problems and improve their well-being (International Federation of Social Workers, n.d.).

World scientific thought (Goud & Taylor, 2017; Lovelock et al., 2017; Sheremet et al., 2019) divides modern theories of social work into:

1. Basic (general) theories (knowledge that orient). These include: psychodynamic theory of personality), behaviourist theory, cognitive theory, humanistic (existential) theory, family theory and family therapy, systems theory, conflict theory, feminist theories, socialization theories, socio-cultural theories, theories of multiculturalism development.

2. Specific theories and models (knowledge for practice). These include: crisis intervention, socio-ecological theory, impurity theory, motivational counselling, transtheoretical model of behaviour change, sustainable livelihood approach, case management focused on the client's strengths, green social work, dual theory) mandate.

3. Social work: social challenges and postmodern influences

The emergence of postmodernism in the middle of the twentieth century is due to a number of factors, among which are: social, social, cultural and philosophical. The peculiarity of postmodernism is that the direction is not actually aimed at developing new social attitudes, and its main motive is a combination of existing developments, views, opinions, human relations, proclamation of the relativity of truth and values, distrust of authorities, blurring the boundaries between mass and individuality.

Postmodernism is characterized by: the production of a cult of individual independence, a philosophical vision of real life as a theatre of the absurd, which emphasizes the unnaturalness and invalidity of real life, collective unconsciousness, the interweaving of different styles, significant parody and irony of social processes.

The preconditions for the emergence of this trend were disappointment in the ideas of progress, authority, integrity of the world. This direction considers the individual as a subject who is lost in everyday life, acutely experiencing its own loss and alienation of spiritual landmarks, lost touch with the Universe (Zadorozhna, 2012).

Social work in the postmodern period is accompanied by a number of social challenges, among which we can distinguish both predictable and spontaneous. This problem acquires special sharpness and urgency at research of the phenomenon of psychological distress of citizens in the conditions of the Covid-19. Here are the results of an analytical study of the Institute of Sociology National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (Table 1),

which was conducted in the period from 2 to 5 April 2020 and assessed the general state of psychological distress in various target groups of Ukraine who periodically use the Internet. More than 7,000 full interviews were collected. The number of women and men in the sample was 62% and 38%, respectively. The average age of women is 43.0 years, men - 41.5. The results are considered in Table 1.

Table 1. *The results of a survey of Ukrainian citizens on the level of psychological distress*

| Stressors | Increased psychological distress, women, % | Increased psychological distress, men, % |
|--|--|--|
| 1. The probability of covid-19: | 70 | 56 |
| 2. Obsession with news about covid-19 | 68 | 49 |
| 3. Frequency of diseases of respondents for the last six months | 61 | 54 |
| 4. Tensions with the people with whom the respondent lives | 60 | 46 |
| 5. How difficult it will be for them to stay at home permanently in case of strict quarantine. | 53 | 40 |

Source: Dembitsky et al. (2020)

These data indicate the presence of a high level of psychological distress in women with the inclusion of the probability factor of covid-19 (70% respond positively to it against 56% of men). Significant psychological distress occurs when obsessed with news about covid-19 (68% of women against 49% of men) and other factors that provoke negative emotions and stress. The lowest level of distress in both women and men is observed in response to the influence of the factor of strict quarantine and the need to stay at home (53% and 40%, respectively). In general, these surveys show a high predisposition of women to distress compared to men, which necessitates appropriate measures for professional social work and appropriate efforts to avoid negative psychological consequences.

Apart from the issues of social and psychological aspects, the problem of forming the cultural competence of citizens becomes especially relevant. Pecheniuk (2019) singles out the following among the main humanitarian problems of Ukrainian society: distortion of historical

memory, which is manifested by the existing conflict and the struggle for historical truth; differences in the vision of culture in the country (polarization of society regarding the introduction of Western European approaches to ethnic Ukrainian nationalism on the one hand, and a return to the values defended by the Soviet Union on the other); difficulties in overcoming the post-Soviet syndrome; insufficient level of educational and informational competence of citizens; hypothetical support of European values, but their selective implementation in everyday practice; destruction of cultural space (most citizens (60%) did not read books (electronic or printed) and did not visit the library; 50% of the adult population of Ukraine has not attended any cultural event during the last year; only 1% of the population attend cultural events as often as they wish; 50% of respondents say that they would attend cultural events more often if they had more money; 17% of respondents noted the lack of opportunities for creative and artistic development of children in their locality. The influence of these factors leads to the threat of loss of educational and cultural competencies.

Quite a complex moral problem, according to Povtoreva S. and Saveliev V., which emerged in the postmodern era, is nomadism (nomadic lifestyle), which involves the rejection of the rigid structural organization of life. Representatives of postmodern culture are looking for the positive in themselves, their family or nation, as in different interest groups. This is manifested in the brutal struggle for power, business, but at the same time the rhetoric about the struggle for justice, democracy, human rights, under which this struggle is disguised, is acceptable.

An important aspect of the Postmodern era is the question of the image of social reality in society, as scientific and technological progress activates the public consciousness at both individual and collective levels.

Based on the development of network communications, the emergence of a new type of information society, and changing the direction of socialization of the individual in it. In this case, we can say about the formation of information socialization of the individual, the main emphasis of which is the problem of readiness and ability in such a world to approach through scientific and technical activities to a more humane understanding of social phenomena (Nerubasska et al., 2020; Nerubasska & Maksymchuk, 2020). It should be recognized that the new reality, which is based on information and computer technology is virtual and revolutionary in its impact on society.

In terms of social virtualization, according to Okorokova (2018) there is a “Homo virtualis”, a virtual person with a virtualized consciousness, which is the creator, carrier and consumer of such phenomena. Such a

person is a collective, his activity is accompanied by the growth of a network of acquaintances and the creation of “electronic communities”. This is most often a reaction to the isolation of the subject of modern society.

Modern trends in social work are its significant internationalization. In general, the hierarchy of social work can be divided into levels (Fig. 1):

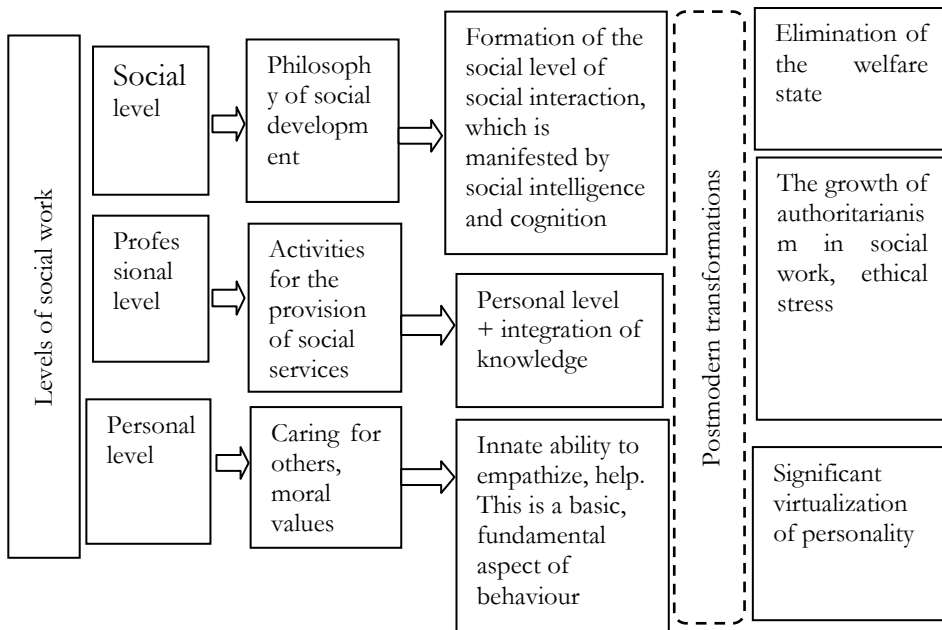


Fig. 1. *Hierarchy of social work.*

Source: developed by the authors Iryna Savelchuk and Daria Bybyk

The first level is characterized by personal skills, innate abilities and psychological readiness for this type of activity, as well as characterizes the basic human behaviour for social stimuli, challenges and his willingness to empathize and help.

The second level involves the availability of skills and professional skills for social work, which can be achieved as a result of training. At this stage, a set of theoretical and practical measures is applied to provide social services to certain social groups or individuals in order to socially adapt them. In our opinion, the basis of the professional level of social work should be personal quality indicators and innate readiness for social activities.

The third level characterizes a highly developed society, which is characterized by a high level of tolerance, for which effective social work is a philosophy of social development and well-being, aimed at preventive measures. The basis is social intelligence and cognitive environment.

Postmodern transformations have a negative impact on social work, often modifying it. For example, at the personal level, the process of virtualization of the individual leads to changes in the dimensions of its existence, reproduces the conditions close to reality, through which it is possible to experience in real time feelings and emotions that will be unavailable in everyday life.

Modern scientific thought has an active discourse on whether a virtual person can be considered a person. Having analyzed research on this issue (Koles & Nagy, 2012; Korotkevich, 2019; Okorokova, 2018; van der Sloot, 2012), we share the opinion of Okorokova (2018) that it consists exclusively of the signs and actions of the images, thoughts and feelings that it generates, but is characterized by a lack of physical form and material representation. The result can be an even deeper feeling of loneliness, depression, social alienation, even in the presence of an active virtual life. This necessitates the transition of social work to another level, which will cover the direction of virtual social life.

At the second, professional level of social work, postmodernist tendencies give rise to conflicts of values and behaviour in social workers, and neoliberal tendencies in higher education regarding the training of social workers are threatening to the profession.

The third level of social work through the prism of postmodernism and neoliberal concept, despite the declared support of social ideas and humanism, can be described as the elimination of the welfare state, the narrowing of social work and its de-professionalization. However, Antony Schaffarczyk and Holloway (2012) believe that postmodernist frameworks are beneficial in terms of the diversity of discourses for the practice of social work and the understanding of the dynamics between them - especially regarding government actions.

Mohammad Khosravishakib (2012) defines postmodernism as a condition or state of association with changes in institutions and conditions, as well as with social and political outcomes and innovations.

The state, which is under the influence of the postmodernist paradigm, has gradually moved away from guaranteeing and ensuring the interests of society towards ensuring the priority of the selfish needs of individuals. The change of moral norms and values in postmodern society causes the phenomenon of tribalism, which is accompanied by the division

of Western society into subcultures and closed communities and undermines the principles of a single national culture (Povtoreva & Saveliev, 2005).

We agree in part with the conclusion of Jing Yin (2018) in the sense that postmodernism limits the concept of culture to purely Western traditions, and considers all other cultures “archaic” or “backward”. That is why the author emphasizes the gradual departure from European narratives and the formation of national cultures.

According to Petrovskiy (2011), the philosophy of postmodernism focuses on diverse, deep and inexhaustible knowledge of society and man as a complex value structure and is a necessary condition for the introduction of democratic governance in the practice of social relations. To do this, theorists of postmodernism suggest using deconstruction, ridicule, irony and parody.

Authors Haievaia et al. (2018) group the basic principles and values of postmodernism as: uncertainties, ambiguities, omissions; principled fragmentarism; opposition to all conventional authorities; the “devastation” of the traditional self, which is deprived of its imaginary “depth”; defending unrealism, irony; “hybridization”; “carnivalization”; emphasizes the “constructivist nature” of creativity (but not in Kant’s logical-scientific and not even in the Nietzschean sense).

4. Conclusions

Postmodernist tendencies of social work are conditioned by the growing need for a critical understanding of the crisis state of modern society. Postmodern transformations modify social work, often having a negative impact. The emergence of this area is due to disappointments in the ideas of progress, authorities, the integrity of the world. In Ukrainian realities, significant stratification in society, revolutions and war, oversaturation of the information space with negative and destructive facts, significant manipulation of public opinion formed a socially aggressive environment, which began to be perceived by people at the subconscious and conscious levels and defined as hostile and destructive. In addition, Postmodern tendencies form the concept of a new social reality, which is characterized by significant virtualization of the personality and the absence of its physical representation in social processes, which can lead to a deeper feeling of loneliness and social alienation and requires the transition of social work to another level, which will cover precisely the direction virtual public life.

Changing moral norms and values in postmodern society is accompanied by division into subcultures and closed communities

undermines the foundations of a single national culture, but at the same time, postmodernism not only creates new worldviews, but also forms a new understanding of humanism, morality and ethics, creating a new social content.

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